

# The Spectator annual statement 2018

When *The Spectator* was founded in 1828, its declared purpose was ‘to convey intelligence’. Exactly 190 years later, the magazine still prides itself on its originality of thought, independence of opinion and elegance of expression. We try to avoid editorial balance: our motto is ‘firm, but unfair’.

Our complaints policy is very simple: we follow Ipso’s Editors’ Code, which is circulated to all editors and staff writers, and correct any factual errors as soon as they are brought to our attention. We haven’t sought pre-publication advice from Ipso, and don’t envisage having to do so. I receive complaints and adjudications directly from readers and from Ipso, assigning a staff member to handle complaints if necessary. We are a small team and I share complaints and adjudications with the author and our small team of in-house journalists. As part of our ongoing training, we scheduled a legal training seminar, which was held in January 2019 and included discussion of previous complaints and our responsibilities under the Editors’ Code.

As editor, I am personally responsible for every sentence in the magazine – even the bits that I disagree with. I am also the ‘responsible person’ under section 1.2 of Ipso Regulations Annex A. I mentor and train our small team of editorial staff, as well as overseeing our quality control procedures. Currently every page in the features section needs a triple sign-off. Nothing is printed without approval from a lawyer, a sub-editor and a commissioning editor. Of course, as with every member of Britain’s free press, our real standards are set not by any regulator but by our readers, who expect us to maintain the highest possible standards of argument and accuracy.

In 2018 one adverse Ipso judgement went against *The Spectator*: a complaint regarding the number of Muslims who said they were willing to engage in terrorism. The number we gave was incorrect. This was dealt with in the appropriate manner: with a correction online and a clarification in print. Our staff were informed about the adjudication and we discussed the importance of checking claims. We also discussed the complaint at our legal training seminar.

In an era of hyper-scrutiny, journalists are quite rightly under more pressure than ever to get the facts right. We are conscious that campaign groups will sometimes use Ipso as a tool to express their displeasure at various articles. On the whole, we are impressed at the way Ipso distinguishes genuine complaints from those vexatious claims motivated by political disagreements. This year, however, a complainant who levelled several (groundless) accusations of inaccuracy succeeded in having a complaint upheld on the bizarre basis that an author was speculating when saying a certain rule would be applied to a certain situation. (Specifically, what teachers should do if a trans girl plays with her penis in front of another girl in a school changing room.) In saying which rule would likely be applied, we did not explicitly flag up that this was conjecture – and so fell foul of a rule saying articles ought to differentiate between fact and conjecture. This rule is true for news stories, but this was an opinion piece (which, by their nature, blend fact and opinion). We are hoping that this decision was a blip and does not suggest a new direction for Ipso.

Fraser Nelson, editor